Distr.
GENERAL

UNCLDC II/5
16 March 1990

Original: ENGLISH

SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Preparatory process for the Conference

# REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL EXPERTS' MEETING ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

(Niamey (Niger) 29-31 January 1990)

GE.90-50720/1678B

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in his capacity as the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, with financial support from the Governments of Canada, the Netherlands and Norway, convened the High-level Experts' Meeting on the Role of Women in the Development of the Least Developed Countries. The meeting formed part of preparations for the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The Meeting was hosted by the Government of Niger and took place in Niamey from 29 to 31 January 1990. Twenty-eight high-level experts in their personal capacity along with representatives from six international organizations participated in the Meeting. A list of participants is annexed.

2. The Meeting was opened by Mrs. Aissata MOUMOUNI, Minister for Social Affairs and Promotion of Women of the Government of Niger. In her inaugural speech, the Minister stated that the Government of Niger recognized the important role played by women in development and had accordingly taken steps to incorporate women in all its development efforts. She underlined that this Meeting would reinforce the international strategies for women's development laid down in preceding international conferences, including measures to give women enhanced access to health, education, services, training, employment and financial credit, as well as greater participation at the planning level. The Meeting would also promote awareness of the need for allocating greater resources to support the contribution of women in the least developed countries.

3. In his statement, Mr. Pushkar N. PANT, Executive Secretary of the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, stated that the purpose of the Meeting was to examine the contribution of women to development of the least developed countries and the constraints imposed and to formulate appropriate strategies for both national and international action enhancing their role.

4. Chapter I of this report presents the conclusions and recommendations agreed upon at the Meeting.

Part One

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AGREED UPON

I. OVERVIEW

5. The Meeting noted that although the least developed countries (LDCs) differ in climate, area, size of population, natural resources and culture, they share common problems, some of which particularly affect women as agents and beneficiaries of development.

6. The LDCs are entering the 1990s in a critical state caused by their deteriorating socio-economic conditions as compared to the 1960s (as regards food self-sufficiency, prices of primary commodities and external assistance needs). The Meeting underlined that women have been affected more than men by this deteriorating situation.

7. In order to assist the LDCs to go beyond survival efforts and reach sustainable development, it is necessary to recognize, enhance and facilitate women's contribution to the economies of their countries. In this connection, the various roles women play in ensuring the achievement of national development objectives were reaffirmed. Women's participation in the formal and informal sector, particularly in cottage industries, trade and marketing, was evidence of their substantial contribution to the economy of the LDCs. It was noted, however, that their efforts were not fully reflected in statistical records. This to a great extent did not make room for the inclusion of women's issues in development planning and, consequently, their efforts were constrained in many ways.

8. In order to enhance and facilitate the contribution of women, it would be necessary to overcome certain constraints which they face, such as the following:

(a) The cultural attitudes of both men and women, which tend to make people accept the inferior status of women;

(b) The lack of confidence of women in themselves and of the society towards them;

(c) The unequal access of women to education, training, employment, earnings and to the means of production (technology, land and credit);

(d) The inadequate participation of women in decision-making, especially in development planning;

(e) The non-accountability of women's contribution to GDP;

(f) The non-recognition of women's work in the informal sector;

(g) The lack of information and statistical data disaggregated by sex;

(h) The absence of clear policies on the part of the Governments of LDCs with regard to the integration of women in the development process;

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(i) The weakness of national structures in promotion of women (because of insufficient human and financial resources);

(j) Degradation of the environment;

(k) The fact that government development projects invariably displaced women - specifically agricultural and industrial-related projects had often impinged greatly on women;

(l) The insufficient focus on women's needs in programmes of assistance; and the fact that projects for women were often remedial in nature and neither integrated nor implemented with a holistic approach; and

(m) The particularly adverse (direct and indirect) effects of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) on LDCs' population, especially effects on women and children.

9. During the discussion, several solutions were advocated, including, as a priority, measures regarding education and training. In this area, it was deemed essential to take an integrated approach, which combined functional literacy programmes with income-generating activities, easing the domestic and agricultural work burden and granting access to credit. Other solutions recommended were as follows:

(a) Establishment of effective structures endowed with the necessary means to accomplish the tasks assigned;

(b) Mobilization and enhancement of awareness of women themselves concerning their own rights, rather than waiting for such rights to be eventually bestowed;

(c) Use of the media for the dissemination of information both on women and for women; and orienting such information so as to provide a realistic and positive image of women;

(d) Use of existing favourable socio-economic factors to promote women, especially in the field of health and education of children;

(e) Organization of women into pressure groups; and necessary collaboration between educated women and those who did not have the chance to attend school;

(f) Establishment of a data base on women; development of new appropriate indicators, taking into account women's contribution to the economy, to be used as an important instrument of planning;

(g) Integration of projects for women in a development package administered from a holistic approach;

(h) Reconsideration of the concept of SAP (even of that underlying the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation) and examination, in the context of structural adjustment, of women's access to income in the formal and informal sectors as well as access to credit and other social facilities.

10. Furthermore, the Meeting stressed:

(a) The need to review patterns of socialization of children within the home, in terms of the division of labour by sex and gender so as to avoid stereotyping, as this was the root cause of certain attitudinal problems that beset learning and work institutions;

(b) The importance of sensitizing and associating men with the elaboration and implementation of measures aimed at promoting the role of women, in order to overcome men's negative attitudes towards women's advancement;

(c) The need for a basic democratic policy, as this is was a necessary condition for effective participation of women in decision-making.

## II. ENHANCING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO, AND PARTICIPATION IN, THE SOCIAL SECTOR

### A. Training

#### (1) Situational problem

11. Several factors have been responsible for the high illiteracy rates among women. They include cultural and traditional practices. Another factor is limited resources available within the household; in this respect, preference is given to boys' education as opposed to girls'.

12. Illiteracy, lack of information and inadequate training are inhibiting factors for women in their efforts to participate at various levels as equal partners and beneficiaries in development. Training therefore is required in order to achieve the following:

(a) Improve the quality of life;

(b) Increase knowledge, skills and aptitude;

(c) Improve productivity and increase income;

(d) Promote participation in decision-making.

13. In fact, training and consciousness-raising are vital for empowering women and raising their capacities as full participants in the development of their countries.

#### (2) Recommendations

##### Action at the national level

14. Training should be tackled from all angles and, to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the training of trainers would form part of the preparatory activities. Efforts should be made to increase the number of women trainers as they are more sensitive to women's problems and also because women may wish to deal with female interlocutors. Categories that required training, other than the teachers of trainees, would include:

(a) Young women drop-outs who need vocational and technical skills for self-employment; they would also require an integrated body of knowledge and information;

(b) Women who have been bypassed in the formal system of education; depending on their background and circumstances, functional literacy and numeracy should form part of their training package;

(c) Professional women who may require further training, to develop their capacities.

15. Training would require a body of integrated knowledge and information that would address the multifaceted issues of development, such as health, agriculture, horticulture, legal rights, productivity, managerial skills and a wide range of awareness creation. Types of training required for the illiterate and semi-literate categories would include: training in functional literacy and numeracy, home management, environmental conservation, health, nutrition and hygiene, food preservation and processing, decision-making, family life education, motivation for achievement, water sanitation, functional literacy.

16. The Meeting stressed the need to link training needs to employment opportunities and to provide adequate financial resources for training.

Action at the international level

17. United Nations agencies, international NGOs and bilateral donors could specifically help with the following:

(a) Establishment of training centres at various levels, including centres for grass-roots trainers;

(b) Development of professional trainers through better utilization of current training centres within LDCs, with emphasis on the development of integrated programmes;

(c) Design of special training sessions and of study tours to neighbouring countries, with a view to promoting the capacities of women professionals and the formation of women experts capable of undertaking the responsibilities of policy direction, planning, monitoring and evaluation processes in different fields;

(d) Development of appropriate curricula for various areas of training, aimed in particular at raising the quality of life of the rural population.

B. Formal education

(1) Situational problem

18. Since formal education for women is a prerequisite to successful social and economic development of the LDCs, all efforts must be made to identify those factors that enhance and/or inhibit women's education, with a view to accelerating the benefits of enhancing factors and removing the inhibiting ones. In particular, the Meeting noted that there were still very few women

in important senior positions, restricted for holders of high academic qualifications. Such positions related to professions which conferred distinction and recognition and which could influence policy decisions or attract high financial remuneration.

(2) Constraints

19. Despite the increase in the enrolment of females in schools, the review showed that in most LDCs the higher the level in the educational system, the fewer the number of females represented. This was attributed to female drop-out rates. Certain cultural factors adversely affected female participation in higher level education. Increasing rates of teenage pregnancy and early marriage were factors that impeded women's access to education. In the light of the above, constraints on female education may be summarized as follows:

(a) Early pregnancy;

(b) Early marriage;

(c) Social pressure;

(d) Poverty in the household;

(e) De facto discrimination by sex;

(f) Long distances to and from schools;

(g) Negative attitudes;

(h) The use of the female child to assist in domestic labour.

(3) Measures to address the constraints

20. The Meeting proposed the following measures to overcome the obstacles:

Action at the national level

(a) There should be adequate budgetary allocations for education with specific allocation for female students at all levels. This budgetary effort could be achieved by:

- Cutting down on the arms budget to supplement that of education;

- Launching educational investment schemes;

- Reducing the period of training in schools;

(b) Free and compulsory education should be provided for girls at the primary and middle school level, as a means to eliminate financial constraints in educating girls;

(c) It is necessary to raise awareness with regard to:

- Family life education and family planning;

- Legal marriage age;

- Implications of certain adverse traditional and culture practices;

- Changes in attitude;.

(d) Financial resources devoted to primary level education should be increased;

(e) Non-stereotyped curricula geared towards employment should be developed.

Action at the international level

(a) UNESCO and other multilateral donors should give special attention and financial support to LDCs to make them realize their objectives of literacy eradication and primary education for all during the decade. There should be special budgetary allocations for the education of women;

(b) NGOs should be encouraged to go further into the field of literacy and education for girls.

C. Health

(1) Objectives

21. The health of women in the LDCs continues to be impaired by hazardous traditional practices such as early marriage, early pregnancy, female circumcision and hazardous domestic chores such as pounding grains, fetching well-water, and carrying firewood. Coupled with this, maternal mortality and morbidity rates remained high, while fertility levels continued to rise. The Meeting noted with great concern the implication of women's poor health on their productive and reproductive roles in the economic and social development of LDCs. In view of the above-mentioned considerations, the Meeting proposed the following objectives which should be achieved by the LDCs in a specific, realistic time-frame.

(a) To ensure women's access to basic medicine;

(b) To provide primary health care programmes in all villages and settlements;

(c) To ensure women's access to maternal and child-care services;

(d) To provide family planning and family life education programmes for women and girls, as well as for men and boys;

(e) To provide training programmes in nutrition for women and to ensure that nutritional standards were maintained at reasonable levels.

(2) Obstacles to achieving these objectives

22. However, certain obstacles may hamper the achievement of these objectives and they include:

(a) Ignorance and lack of information on health related issues;

(b) Distance from health centres and problems of transportation;

(c) The impact of environmental deterioration on human health;

(d) Lack of basic medicine.

(3) Recommendations

23. The following measures were recommended by the Meeting:

Action at the national level

(a) To allocate at least 10 per cent of the national budget to health services and health programmes;

(b) To decentralize health facilities;

(c) To create awareness, inter alia, through the use of the media and audio-visual materials, of the following concerns:

- Safe motherhood;

- Personal and environmental sanitation;

- Family planning and family life education;

- Preventive health care and nutrition;

- Implications of practices hazardous to health;

- The spread of AIDS;

(d) To develop appropriate and adequate health infrastructure;

(e) To design programmes aimed at achieving health objectives;

(f) To train health-care workers, including traditional birth attendants and influential village leaders; and also, in particular, to provide support to women in the performance of their traditional role as birth attendants and village health-care workers;

(g) To implement the "Action Plan on Maternity Without Risks", designed at an international conference on health in the developing countries.

Action at the international level

(a) United Nations agencies, bilateral donors and international NGOs should be urged to direct funds more to health projects at the grass-roots level;

(b) Women's international organizations should expand work on issues of maternal and child health in the rural areas and for the urban poor.

## III. PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PRODUCTIVE SECTOR

### A. Women and rural development

24. The debate on this point revolved around two principal questions:

(a) How can women's role in rural development best be promoted?

(b) How can women be enabled to increase and improve economic productivity, to meet both their own needs and community needs, for the family's survival and for the realization of national development objectives?

#### (1) Constraints

25. Today all LDC Governments tended to recognize, and rightly so, that women played an important role in the national economy and that they should not be discriminated against. However, in daily experience the good intentions or resolutions often contained in legal texts, were not always translated into good practice and wise decisions, especially in so far as concerns the poorest rural women confined to a subsistence existence. The central role of women in meeting self-sufficiency in food production had yet to be fully recognized.

26. The participants emphasized a series of constraints facing rural women in their countries, as follows:

(a) Women were over-burdened with work, spending long hours fetching water, gathering fuel-wood, and milling grains; this had a debilitating effect on their health. Drought and desertification had lengthened women's working hours; the fact that they had to use outdated technology for food processing and the manufacture of goods for daily use exacerbated their plight;

(b) Women lacked access to factors of production - often women had access to land only in remote areas and/or that which was least profitable, but not to fertile land. It was difficult if not sometimes impossible for women to obtain bank credit, extension services, inputs and equipment necessary for increasing their output and income. Women were forced to come together in groups because of such difficulties of access on an individual basis;

(c) There was no clearly defined policy relating to women's participation in economic development, in general, and more particularly to their participation at different strategic levels of agricultural production (subsistence, semi-commercial and commercial);

(d) Women lacked training in modern techniques of management which would allow them to exploit agricultural production (such as that relating to preparation of the soil, sowing, reaping, control over appropriate technology, irrigation, use of pesticides, conservation and transformation of products or their commercialization, etc.);

(e) Women also lacked access to labour-saving, efficient technology because they were either illiterate or not adequately informed and trained, or because they did not have the means to acquire the techniques. Moreover, certain cultural attitudes also prevented them from gaining access to information or training even where such facilities did exist;

(f) Rural women face difficulties in selling their products because of the absence or paucity of a transport network. Moreover, the liberalization of prices has benefited mainly, if not only, the intermediaries;

(g) The lack of firm commitments by LDC Governments to promote local initiative and rural industries.

(2) Recommendations

Action at the national level

27. To enhance the situation and status of women in the rural sector, LDC Governments should:

(a) Adopt legal codes that guarantee women's legal rights on the same basis as men to full use, control, ownership and inheritance of land, livestock and other productive assets; the reformation of land laws based on equity should be a priority strategy for agricultural transformation;

(b) Re-examine the traditional and customary systems of allocating land to women, and reactivate such systems where they are positive and advantageous;

(c) Undertake measures aimed at easing women's work burden through: the introduction of more efficient technology for the processing of agricultural and piscicultural products; labour-saving devices to enhance and increase women's productivity; training, especially by launching functional literacy and vocational training programmes; the improvements of the water-supply network, involving women where possible in the choice of sites of water pumps/wells;

(d) Fixing quotas for the admission of women in agricultural institutes for vocational training (as technicians, extension-service agents and researchers in agronomy);

(e) Include extension services and training in agricultural and horticultural activities as an integral part of an agricultural package;

(f) Incorporate, in rural training programmes, training related to the status and role of women in development;

(g) Encourage women to acquire competence in the field of agro-industry and other fields connected with agriculture;

(h) Encourage traditional savings systems (c.f. section C below);

(i) Ease the terms of agricultural credit (c.f. section C below);

(j) Provide women's organizations with more material and financial facilities for the storage, conservation and marketing of agricultural products. Such assistance should take the form of technical as well as practical project-support managed and administered by women themselves;

(k) Provide rural trails, roads and other related infrastructure indispensable for improving the marketing of products from rural areas;

(l) Associate women who gather and use wood, for subsistence and as a source of income, in debates on the environment (such as selection of trees) and on measures to preserve the environment, while providing them with the means to apply optimal measures;

(m) Associate women with the establishment of warning systems and follow-up on natural calamities as well as of programmes aimed at reducing post-harvest losses and food wastage.

Action at the international level

28. Bilateral donors, international aid agencies and NGOs should provide financial and technical assistance to support the above-mentioned measures.

B. Income-generating activities and small and micro-scale enterprises

29. In the area of employment, income-generating activities were seen as an effective strategy for women's economic independence. These activities are many and varied. They range from small-scale traders to medium and large social entrepreneurial activities and include village and cottage industries.

(1) Constraints

30. The following constraints affecting women in small-scale enterprises were identified by the Meeting:

(a) Although handicraft and small-scale industries contribute vastly to the socio-economic development of the LDCs, they are usually ignored in national development plans. However, it is in these areas, where women have a big role to play;

(b) As small- and micro-scale entrepreneurs, women often rely on old methods of production compounded by illiteracy;

(c) Since women have no assets to pledge as guarantees to financial institutions, they cannot get credit or loans from banks to help them invest in expanding their activities (e.g. purchases of raw materials, new or improved equipment, etc);

(d) Women also face marketing problems: small- and micro-scale entrepreneurs must depend on intermediaries to sell their products because they do not have marketing knowledge or access to markets.

(2) Recommendations

31. The Meeting pointed to the need for further strengthening and developing the informal employment sector.

Action at the national level

32. LDC Governments should:

(a) In integrating women's issues in national development plans, ensure the enhancement of women's role in small-scale industries (including trade, services, industry and handicrafts);

(b) Launch literacy programmes to assist small- and micro-scale entrepreneurs to understand and learn new technology that can increase their work productivity;

(c) Provide training in entrepreneurial and management skills, facilitate confidence-building through motivation for achievement, and make financial resources available for the expansion of businesses;

(d) Help women to promote their products locally and internationally;

(e) Provide tax exemption for small-scale industries importing new equipment, in order to boost their production capacities and their capacity to compete in international markets;

(f) Give legal protection to women's activities and create a favourable administrative environment;

(g) Create non-conditional credit facilities, with low interest rates;

(h) Establish mechanisms to provide women with support services, equipment and raw materials;

(i) Help in resolving the problem of getting packaging containers, in order to encourage local food-processing activities by women.

Action at the international level

33. External support should be provided by bilateral and multilateral donors, United Nations agencies and NGOs so as to enable the LDCs to carry out the above-mentioned measures.

C. Credit

(1) Constraints

34. Credit facilities in most LDCs are inadequate to meet the credit needs of women. In the LDCs, four out of five economically active women are engaged in farming, livestock raising, fishing and forestry, mostly in low-production, family-based units. The majority of the rest are self-employed or wage-earning labourers in micro-enterprises in the informal sector. Lack of credit facilities has prevented women from investing in better tools, inputs and technologies to increase their production. Credit institutions require forms of collateral which most women do not possess (e.g. land, buildings, or other fixed assets); loans offered are short term with high interest rates.

(2) Recommendations

35. The Meeting recommended the following measures to be taken:

Action at the national level

36. LDC Governments should aim at improving women's access to credit by:

(a) Making legal changes (if necessary) to enable women to receive credit in their own right and not just through their husband or other male figure;

(b) Establishing other forms of collateral (e.g. women's groups' joint responsibility); and providing credit to women's groups;

(c) Offering long-term loans with flexible conditions suitable to the users at low rates of interest;

(d) Establishing credit facilities at the grass-roots level, using traditional savings practices;

(e) Ear-marking for women a proportion of small-scale and agricultural credit.

Action at the international level

(a) International donors should make available more funds for credit schemes that will benefit women in LDCs;

(b) Agricultural and para-agricultural training projects should have in-built provision for credit programmes for the trainees;

(c) The activities of rural banking institutions (national and international), in line with the experience of the "Grameen Bank" which extends credit to women without collateral in Bangladesh, and of Women's World Banking, should be promoted to meet various LDCs' needs and to facilitate access to credit for rural women;

(d) Women's World Banking should provide to the LDCs relevant information on its schemes and experience, so that they can be used by women in these countries.

## IV. INCORPORATING WOMEN'S CONCERNS INTO MAINSTREAM DEVELOPMENT

### A. Environmental degradation and regeneration

#### (1) Constraints

37. The Meeting noted that women in the LDCs faced the following constraints:

(a) Environmental degradation and deforestation had particularly affected women from landless and poorer households who had to forage and walk longer distances to fulfil the needs of households for fuel, fodder and water;

(b) Women as gatherers of minor forest produce had already been adversely affected by deforestation, as they once supplied not only their basic minimum needs from the forests but forests were also the source of self-employment and income;

(c) Deforestation, desertification and soil degradation had affected food production and medicinal usage of plants;

(d) Competition over the use of land for food crops, cash crops and afforestation for meeting fuel and fodder needs had grown. Emphasis on cash crops had marginalized the role of women as subsistence producers who grew food crops for their families;

(e) In some countries, afforestation programmes had led to the planting of commercial tree species to meet the raw material requirements of industries and urban markets, instead of meeting the subsistence needs of women;

(f) Women's participation in programmes of afforestation was constrained by their lack of access to land and by legislation on forests and also by policies inhibiting the use of degraded forest land for planting species which women would prefer.

(g) Forest- and land-management programmes had remained male-oriented and male dominated, thus marginalizing women's participation.

(2) Recommendations

Action at the national level

38. The Meeting recommended the following:

(a) Governments and local women's organizations should ensure that women were represented in the planning and management of afforestation programmes at all levels and that women forest experts were well trained to consider in these programmes the women in development issues;

(b) The local, natural resource base should be protected so as to sustain the needs of local people, particularly women;

(c) It is also necessary to sensitize women regarding the use of new forms of energy.

Action at the international level

39. United Nations agencies and specialized NGOs should sensitize forest and land management specialists about women's needs and priorities. This can be undertaken through training programmes, the mass-media, the design of special audio-visual material on "Women and afforestation".

B. Participation of women in decision-making and in development planning

40. The Meeting noted that the lack of democracy and the non-respect of human rights, especially those of women, were incompatible with the social and economic development of the LDCs. It pointed out that women's issues should also be considered and discussed in terms of a developmental and political dimension and not only from a social perspective. The role women play in building a power base for men is manifested in their various functions in society. Such functions should be diverted into empowering women for more meaningful participation as equal partners and beneficiaries.

41. The Meeting recognized the efforts of women's movements in establishing grass-roots organizations and pressure groups for social, economic and political mobilization of women, and called for their support and for the further strengthening of their capabilities.

(1) Constraints

42. The Meeting held that women had been associated less so than men with the management of their countries' social and economic policies, because of a number of reasons, which include:

(a) Women's inferior status accorded by society and to which women have become resigned;

(b) The higher illiteracy rates among women and their lack of training in the analysis of problems of development and in the techniques of economic and financial planning;

(c) Insufficient organization of women;

(d) Weak women's machinery because of allocation of inadequate financial resources and personnel;

(e) Non-recognition of the effective contribution of women to their countries' economies;

(f) Failure of development planners to incorporate women's specific needs in national development plans.

(2) Recommendations

43. A change of cultural attitudes and social pressures is imperative to women's advancement, empowerment and fuller participation in development as both agent and beneficiary, and this can only be reached if women have the following:

(i) capable and strong institutions that work for their purpose;

(ii) organizations that unify them to reach their objectives; and

(iii) material and technical support from other international women, institutions and organizations supporting them.

Action at the national level

44. The Meeting underlined the need to mobilize women who constitute more than half of the human resources in the LDCs in order to optimize their actual and potential contribution. In this respect, LDCs' Governments should:

(a) Adopt legislation and undertake necessary concrete measures for the elimination of discrimination against women;

(b) Ensure that women get education and professional training;

(c) Create special women's units within the national planning body and in the principal Ministries to take charge of women's programmes and projects, and, also to ensure that they are allocated adequate resources and personnel;

(d) Help women form many organizations;

(e) Guarantee an adequate representation of women, in quality and quantity, in decision-making at the local level as well as at the national and regional levels. This could include reserving for them certain important senior positions at all levels of decision-making and planning; in cases where women do not have the requisite experience or qualifications, specialized training should be provided.

45. Ministries for women's affairs and national women's organizations should plead for government support in order to obtain budgetary allocations for improving women's levels of information, education, training and health. They should launch a campaign to:

(i) sensitize the public on the importance of women's role in development, and on the need to enhance it; and

(ii) inform women on ways they could improve their standards of living.

46. The Meeting also called for efforts on the part of women themselves, such as:

(a) Organizing themselves to study, express and defend their interests;

(b) Reinforcing solidarity among women of all social strata;

(c) Acquiring the knowledge and technical skills necessary for an equal dialogue with men;

(d) Demonstrating their own sacrifices and involvement in building a vital future for their children.

Action at the international level

47. Bilateral and multilateral donors, women's international organizations and non-governmental organizations which are engaged in promoting the status of women and their contribution to development, should:

(a) Support the efforts of LDC Governments in the definition and establishment of a clear policy with effective strategies and programmes of action integrating women in the development process;

(b) Provide technical and financial support to women's institutions and organizations in the LDCs, in order to promote their work and help them to contribute to the design, implementation and evaluation of policies, strategies and action programmes elaborated by their Governments;

(c) Where women's institutions at the policy planning levels do not exist or are marginalized, United Nations agencies and bilateral donors should ensure that these institutions are created or strengthened, as the case may be;

(d) Facilitate exchange of information and experience among women in the LDCs.

C. Issue of structural adjustment programmes, drawing guidelines from LDCs women's perspectives

(1) Constraints

48. The Meeting reviewed structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the LDCs and agreed that despite their positive impact on economic stability in some cases, the SAPs had had in all cases adverse implications for vulnerable groups such as women and children. In particular, programmes involving the retrenchment of workers, budget cuts in health care, education and other social services, and the targeting or elimination of subsidies (affecting vulnerable groups in terms of food intake) had adverse consequences on women.

49. It was felt that a possible increase of prices in cash crop products would make men compete for land/water resources usually relegated to women for the production of food crops. Thus women would either lose these assets or they would be pushed out to more marginal areas. While a possible increase in food prices might benefit women food producers, any increase would, nevertheless, hit female heads of households and other poor families obliged to buy food.

50. It was also felt that the liberalization and privatization aspects in SAPs may not lead to increased incomes for the majority of the population nor enhance the overall economy.

(2) Recommendations

Action at the national level

51. The Meeting therefore:

(a) Calls upon LDC Governments to examine women's access to income in the formal and informal sectors as well as address family needs in the context of adjustment policies;

(b) Urges LDC Governments to involve women in round-table donors' conferences;

(c) Urges LDC Governments in future, not to cut down on budgetary allocations for social services under SAPs.

52. The Meeting also recommended the following measures to be taken in order to ensure that SAPs have a human face:

(a) LDC Governments should have clear policies to make the upper income groups share more of any burden during the SAP period by:

- diversifying and increasing taxes;

- paying real prices for offered goods and services;

- cross-subsidizing basic goods, etc.

(b) At the national planning level, specific machinery should be established to address the women's dimension in the SAP, for example, by creating a women's section which would be directly involved during the SAP negotiation and programming process;

(c) Women's groups should undertake participatory research and planning to specify what income opportunities could be opened for women during the SAP;

(d) Long-term developmental programmes of agro-industries and cottage industries should promote import substitutes as a priority over production for export;

(e) The formulation of national SAPs in line with LDCs' national culture, objectives and developmental perspectives of independence and self-sustenance should be encouraged.

Action at the international level

53. The following measures are recommended, with special attention to be paid to ensure that SAPs have a human face:

(a) Donors should ear-mark specific budget allocations for women's development projects during the period of SAP in order to mitigate the negative impact of SAPs on women;

(b) National, regional and international organizations should urge the IMF, the World Bank and other financing agencies (banks) to promote an approach to SAP "with a human face" and one with a central concern for the situation of women in this process;

(c) NGOs and United Nations agencies should have special budget allocations, for incentives and subsidies to women as food producers, so as to gain food security during SAPs;

(d) Lenders should ensure that debt relief measures (including debt cancellation) are taken during SAPs. It is their responsibility to help the majority of the poor overcome any short-term negative impact of SAP.

54. The Meeting also called upon both LDCs and the international community to consider models of development that would guarantee a ripple effect benefiting the majority of the LDCs' population.

V. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

55. Finally, the Meeting put forward the following general recommendations:

A. Enhancing women's role in development

At the national level

56. The Meeting urges Governments of LDCs to take a political decision for the creation of different national women's organizations with co-ordinating national women's machinery.

At the international level

57. It calls upon:

(a) The international community to launch an educational campaign for peace. A percentage of the arms budget should be allocated for this purpose;

(b) Bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, including WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO, FAO, UNCTAD, etc., to strengthen their support of social programmes directed to women in LDCs;

(c) United Nations agencies and donors to ensure that regional centres for the development of appropriate technology for women are established. The centres should direct research towards appropriate technology that is geared to lessening the burden of sustenance activities undertaken by women, and which promote the efficiency of their work and raise their health status.

B. Preparing for the Second United Nations Conference on the LDCs in Paris

58. Furthermore, the Meeting:

(a) Requests that a programme for women be explicitly included in the Programme of Action for the LDCs for the 1990s. Within this framework, specific programmes should be designed and implemented by LDC Governments with external financial assistance through country follow-up mechanisms (UNDP round tables, consultative groups).

(b) Calls upon UNCTAD to facilitate the representation of the Meeting on "The Role of Women in Development" to the Intergovernmental Group on the LDCs acting as Preparatory Committee for the Paris Conference.

(c) Calls upon LDC Governments to include at least one woman in the delegation to the Paris Conference.

(d) Calls upon women's NGOs to participate as observers at the Paris Conference on LDCs.

Part two

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

I. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

59. Madame Aissata MOUMOUNI, Minister for Social Affairs and Promotion of Women of the Government of Niger, chaired the Meeting.

60. Mrs. A. KANE, former Minister of Women's Affairs of the Government of Mauritania, and Mrs. Joyce MPANGA, Minister of State for Primary Education of the Government of Uganda, were elected Vice-Chairmen. Mrs. Jacqueline KIZERBO of UNIFEM and Mrs. Safiatou Kassim SINGHATEH of the Gambia were elected Rapporteurs of the Meeting.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

61. The agenda adopted was as follows:

1. Opening of the Meeting

2. Election of officers

3. Adoption of the agenda and organization of the work of the Meeting

4. Review of the contribution of women to the formal and informal sectors in the least developed countries, and of the socio-economic constraints which they face in development

5. Ways and means of strengthening women's role in development in the least developed countries

A. National policies and measures

(a) Promoting women's participation in the productive sectors (agriculture, trade and services), access to and control over land and other resources, to credit and technology, and to employment and income-earning opportunities;

(b) Enhancing women's access to and participation in the social sector: education, health and family planning, (taking into account the impact of structural adjustment on social services);

(c) Incorporating women's concerns into mainstream development programmes, participation of women in the planning process, status of women in the family and in relation to society at large, and the role of women in the preservation and improvement of the environment.

B. International support for the promotion of women's roles in development in the least developed countries

(a) Bilateral donors;

(b) Multilateral agencies;

(c) Non-governmental organizations

6. Other business

7. Recommendations and report of the Meeting

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT OF THE MEETING

62. Two Working Groups had been set up by the Chairman to prepare the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting. At the closing session, on 31 January 1990, the Meeting adopted the conclusions and recommendations together with its report.

ANNEX

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1. Ms. Tegegne AYELECH, Acting Head of Women's Unit, Central Planning Office, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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UNCLDC II/5

Printed at United Nations, Geneva
GE.90-50720-April 1990-4,500